understanding how
homelessness affects us all

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Understanding how Homelessness Affects Us All

(Kitchen Table Discussion Guide and Homelessness Backgrounder)

SUMMARY

Homelessness is a community issue. It is well documented that living without a home has serious impacts on the health and well-being of individuals, What is not discussed as often is the moral implications of our acceptance of homelessness as well as the affects of homelessness on social cohesion, social inclusion and social harmony.

Homelessness Affects Us All is a discussion guide and background information package intended to promote community discussion, dialogue and understanding about the important issues associated with homelessness. The materials address homelessness as both a policy issue (involving local, provincial and federal governments) and as an issue affecting individuals, communities and citizens.

This package has been compiled to help support those taking part in the webcast connected with Headlines Theatre's production of After Homelessness: Theatre Making Policy (November 29, 2009. Groups can use the information before the webcast to help prepare for the event or use it to support follow up discussion and action planning.

Understanding how Homelessness Affects Us All (Kitchen Table Discussion Guide and Homelessness Backgrounder) was originally prepared for Collingwood Neighbourhood House and the Renfrew Collingwood Homelessness Steering Committee. We thank them for their kind permission to allow us to use these documents.

CONTENTS

homelessness affects us all

"I have two degrees and taught high school for 20 years, and I never thought I'd be staying in shelters."

TONY, COLLINGWOOD BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Across Canada a growing number of communities are confronting issues related to homelessness. As the number of people living in shelters and on the streets grows, communities are affected by increased demand on services and supports, which can sometimes lead to conflict between community members.

Since the late 1990s the homelessness problem has been referred to as a "disaster" and the mayors of Canada's major cities have called it a "crisis." More recently, a United Nations agency elevated its assessment of the situation to describe homelessness in Canada as a "national emergency."

Homelessness affects everybody living in a community. Community residents, business owners, community service workers, and homeless individuals themselves deal on a daily basis with the devastating impacts of homelessness on the health and vitality of individuals and communities.

The intention of these booklets is to promote discussion about how homelessness is affecting our communities and to support the development of comprehensive solutions. This booklet provides background information about the root causes of homelessness. It is meant to accompany the booklet, "Kitchen Table Discussion Guide," a compilation of exercises and discussion starters intended to stimulate ideas and action plans.   >

1 homelessness is a community issue

One of the biggest effects of homelessness is the breakdown of community life itself. When a large number of people survives day-to-day and lives with the isolation, fear, and shame that accompanies homelessness, the very foundations of our communities are tested. Communities are affected by homelessness in a number of ways:

1   The moral dimension. We are all morally affected by homelessness as we share public space with fellow citizens living in substandard conditions that affect their physical health, mental health, and spirit. Some of us justify our inaction by claiming that "they brought it on themselves" or that "people choose to be homeless" without understanding the issues that have contributed to the current crisis.

2   Social cohesion. Evidence is growing that societies in which large inequities exist in the distribution of income and resources are unhealthy for all members. Large-scale inequality is associated with a breakdown of social cohesion that leads to increased fear and uncertainty for everyone. Healthy communities are communities in which all members can share in wealth and opportunity. [Wilkinson and Pickett 2006]

3   Social inclusion. Growing homelessness creates divisions within the community as an "us vs. them" mentality develops. If a family is left homeless due to a flood, fire or other sudden tragedy, communities will often rally around to provide aid. In those same communities, individuals living on the streets because of tragedies that are less immediate, but no less severe, often suffer from shame, stigma and isolation.

4   Social harmony. Conflicts over the use of public and community spaces increase when there are large numbers of people without access to their own "private" space. These conflicts can bring to the surface deeply rooted issues linked to negative perceptions about members of society who are poor, vulnerable or marginalized.

"The community sees the negative and that's all they see. They don't see the human side – the fact that they're still people. Some people do drugs to get rid of the pain."

GARY, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"People need support so they can make their own way off the street."

KAREN, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"You've got to give them something to deal with the hopelessness of everything."

ROB, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"Sleep deprivation and lack of nutrition takes a long time to get over. Even from one night of not sleeping it takes time to recover."

TONY, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

2 why are so many people homeless?

Canada's homelessness emergency has been documented by a wide variety of studies and research projects [see the RESOURCES section for a listing of information sources]. The accumulated literature provides a context for homelessness:

The policy background. Decisions by the federal government through the 1990s have effectively ended social and affordable housing programs in Canada. Some provinces, including BC, have continued to build social housing but fewer and fewer units of affordable housing are available for people in need. BC's income assistance rates are the same today as they were in 1994. [Klein and Long 2003]

A changing economy. Changes in the economy and the workforce mean that workers without basic skills are having a harder and harder time competing. Even economic upturns can increase homelessness as job seekers flock to boom areas and compete for jobs and scarce housing.

The housing market. In recent years Greater Vancouver has experienced a housing boom as prices for all forms of housing have escalated rapidly. As a result, many units of low and mid-cost rental housing have been lost as it becomes more profitable to cater to the high-end of the market.

Marginalization and social exclusion. Homelessness is not only increasing, it is affecting a wider array of groups. Reports and studies have documented increasing rates of homelessness amongst specific populations who face unique issues, such as Aboriginal people, families, low income workers, immigrants, seniors and others.

Personal risk factors. Within the context of large scale policy changes and economic transformation, individuals may find themselves at risk due to their own personal circumstances. Homelessness can be a result of cascading losses on a number of fronts. Many specific risk factors have been identified that can leave people especially vulnerable. These include:

- **Mental illness.** Current research estimates between 30% and 50% of people who are homeless experience serious mental health issues. Lack of supportive housing and other services means that people with mental illness who cannot live independently are forced on the streets. [Raising the Roof]

- **Substance misuse.** The same factors that increase the risk of substance abuse also increase the risk of homelessness: poverty, mental illness, incarceration, unemployment or the absence of strong family or peer support networks. Substance misuse is both a cause and a result of homelessness. It can lead to homelessness and act as a barrier to housing stability. And individuals experiencing housing instability may misuse substances as a way of coping. [Health Canada, Canada's Drug Strategy]

- **Family violence.** A study conducted for the federal government found that family vio-

lence was among the factors that cause more than 40% of homeless families to leave their homes. [SPARC BC et al.]

- **Incarceration.** People who have spent time in prison need support during their reintegration into the community to make sure they end up with stable housing and secure incomes.

- **Insecure employment.** Canadians are increasingly working in insecure jobs that do not provide the stability required to maintain adequate housing. Since the 1996 changes to unemployment insurance, only 33% of women and 44% of men are eligible for benefits if they lose their jobs, regardless of whether or not they pay into the system. [Canadian Labour Congress]

- **Foster care.** A number of American studies have made a connection between homelessness and child welfare system involvement. There are two types of links: previous foster care experience is connected with later homelessness and children of homeless families are more likely to end up in care. [Eberle et al 2001]

A number of studies have also found that a person's identity can make them more vulnerable to homelessness. A study conducted for the federal government found that Aboriginal households, recent immigrant households, people living alone and lone parent families (typically headed by women) are in greater core housing need than other households. [Engeland and Lewis 2004] Another federal government study found that gay and lesbian youth are over-represented in the homeless population.

life events prior to homelessness

Life event	%
Job loss	63%
Relationship ended	49%
Eviction	48%
Substance misuse	44%
Debt	42%
Criminal offence	35%
Robbery	34%
Physically beaten or assaulted	29%
Hospitalized (physical)	29%
Correctional facilities	28%
Gambling problem	15%
Serious accident	15%
Hospitalized (mental)	10%
Being sexually assaulted	5%

% of 250   Source: Calgary Homelessness Survey
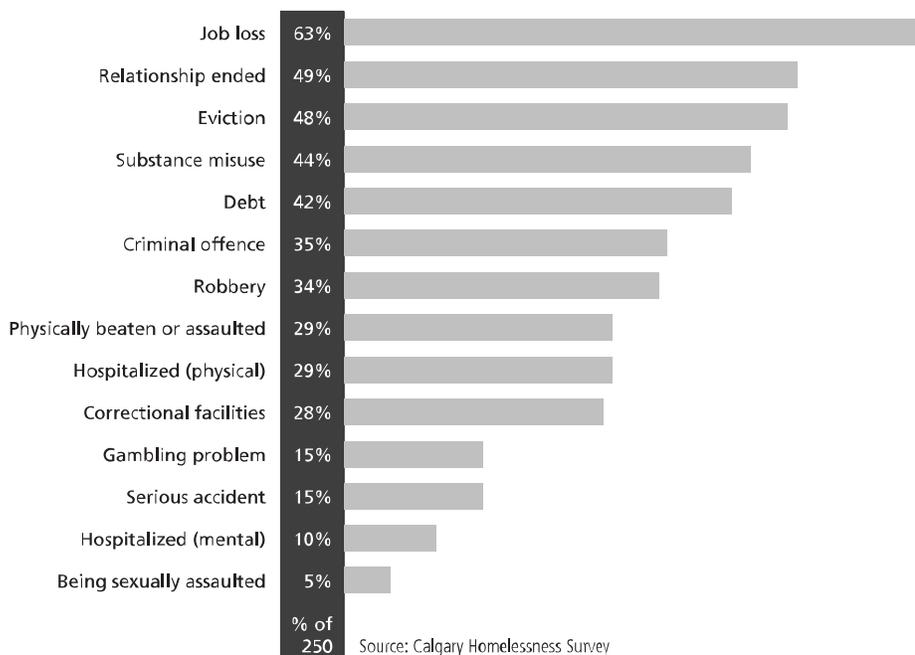
3 the many faces of homelessness

Understanding homelessness begins with the recognition that each individual has his or her own unique story to tell. Homelessness takes as many forms as there are people who are homeless. To help us understand the dimensions of this complex problem, some writers talk about common forms of homelessness.

By talking about multiple dimensions of homelessness we can begin to understand that issues of affordable housing and homelessness affect many of us. In fact, many of us have been at-risk or homeless at some time in our lives. For those who become homeless, the longer a person is without a home the harder it is to find a place to live.

Many definitions of homelessness are used for a variety of purposes. The continuum of homelessness, as described on the table on the following page, is meant to demonstrate that there are many different types of homelessness that affect individuals in a variety of ways. One key issue involves the question of risk; generally, people who spend more than 30% of their income for adequate shelter are seen to be living at risk. The risk increases as the percentage of income used for shelter grows. For people who are homeless, duration and frequency are critical considerations. Strategies and supports may be different to address at-risk, temporary, cyclical, and chronic homelessness.

HOMELESSNESS FACTS

- **2,174 sheltered and street homeless were counted in the Greater Vancouver Homeless Count in March 2005. This was a 94% increase from the 1,121 counted in March 2002.**
  [SPARC BC 2005]

- **74 children (40 families) were identified as living without permanent shelter.**
  [SPARC BC 2005]

- **126,515 people (living in 56,215 households) in Greater Vancouver are living at risk of homelessness. These are people living in substandard housing and spending more than 50% of their income for shelter. [GREATER VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT]**

- **150,000 people in Canada are believed to be homeless. [NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE]**

- **3.5 million people in the US are homeless. An additional 1.5 million lost their homes following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.**
  [NATIONAL LAW CENTRE ON HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY]

the continuum of homelessness

	at risk of homelessness...			forms of homelessness...	
	LIVING AT RISK	**LIVING AT EXTREME RISK**	**TEMPORARILY WITHOUT ACCOMODATION**	**CYCLICALLY HOMELESS**	**CHRONICALLY HOMELESS**
Definition	30% of income spent on housing and in core housing need	50% of income spent on housing and in core housing need	A short term crisis impacts on housing (e.g. fire, natural disaster, separation, couch surfing)	Change in circumstance leads to housing loss (job loss, runaway youths, family violence, release from prison, hospital)	Regularly living rough and using shelters
Mental health effects	Stress and anxiety	Ongoing stress, anxiety and fear	Grief, depression	Shame, isolation	Chronic depression Alcohol and drug misuse
Physical health effects	Poor nutrition	Choosing between shelter and food	Meals missed	Limited access to health care	Dental health Chronic diseases
Individual effects	Hidden impacts	Growing isolation	Increasing personal conflicts	Identity issues	Internalized negative beliefs
Community effects	Community may not be aware	Social services may be impacted	Communities may show concern, support	Negative attitudes my grow	Conflicts may grow Blame the victim

Adapted from Homelessness Parliamentary Research Bureau 1999.

"We need to value them. There's too many hidden treasures living in the bushes."

LOUIS, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"It's not drug addiction. It's the emotional and physical pain."

ROB, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"It's not so much that the homeless are looking for trouble or are hostile to people. If it's a matter of life or death I'm going to sleep and not worry about who I hurt. If your doorway is the only safe, dry place to sleep within walking distance I'm going to sleep there, especially if I've been walking around all day."

OLIN, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

4 | what are the policy solutions?

Just as the causes and symptoms of homelessness are complex and varied, so are the solutions. While individuals and communities can take action to address issues of homelessness [see section 5], governments must play a key role in eliminating homelessness through effective public policy.

An outline of actions that governments can take to end homelessness has been developed by the Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness under the banner of "3 Ways to Home." Policy makers should support activities in the areas of:

- **Affordable housing** includes emergency housing (e.g. shelters, cold-wet weather beds), transitional housing (longer term housing to support recovery and integration into work force), supportive housing (e.g. group homes, support for people with mental illness or developmental disability), and independent housing (e.g. social housing, cooperatives, low-cost market housing, rent subsidy programs)

- **Support services** include counseling, prevention, drop-in services, hot meal programs, and health services addressing issues such as dentistry, podiatry, nutrition and mental health. Community based support programs such as meal programs help to break social isolation, build social inclusion and connect with services that can support transitions from homelessness.

- **Adequate income** includes income support programs (Employment Insurance, Social Assistance) as well as job skills and training programs and job search support.

[REGIONAL HOMELESSNESS PLAN FOR GREATER VANCOUVER 2003]

"There is a nurturing that people need to overcome things. For some people it's been so long since they've been nurtured. That's why programs like the Collingwood Breakfast Program are good because people can come and see how others behave and interact. The environment creates a community. The people here are very, very accepting. It doesn't matter who you are, they seem to really care."

TONY, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"There needs to be more education – workshops to address problems and to deal with stereotypes. People need to learn that these are human beings and their circumstances are different than what we're in right now. Sometimes we forget that it can quickly change."

COLLINGWOOD STAFF MEMBER

5   what are the community solutions?

Because the causes of homelessness are complex and wide-ranging, solutions to the problems associated with homelessness exist at a variety of levels. Our actions as individuals, community members and citizens can make a difference.

Here are a few suggested activities to help you get started in addressing homelessness.

AS INDIVIDUALS

1   Develop understanding. Many people turn a cold shoulder when they see a homeless person on the street. Some think that people are on the street because they choose to be there. Others find it difficult to see people suffering and aren't sure how to respond. This is why starting up a conversation with people on the street can be difficult, but we each have a lot to learn from doing just that. It's true that some people will not want to engage with strangers, but others need to feel a sense that members of their community care about them.

2   Cultivate compassion and caring. People who are homeless have stressed that tolerance, compassion and empathy are important in their lives, and that a nurturing environment helps to create a community where homeless people feel a sense of belonging. Many people who work with people who are homeless report that they have been changed by the experience.

3   Lend a hand. Your compassion can take many different forms. You might give them some spare change or take someone out for a hot meal and conversation. Some people offer to use their cel phone to dial the number of a parent or loved one so that young people can let them know they are all right.

"Over time, people have a low regard for themselves and they've been through abusive situations so they treat their environment the same way. They leave a disaster behind them and others in the community come into contact with it and that's how conflict happens. Not everyone can reach out and be understanding."

TONY, BREAKFAST PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

"All of us need to be educated about homeless people so that we don't stereotype them. When you interact with homeless people you learn to be more compassionate and understanding. The conflict in communities comes from the assumptions that we have about others."

COLLINGWOOD STAFF MEMBER

AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

1   Raise awareness. Organize a forum; display a banner in a prominent location; poster empty buildings or construction sites; respond to local emergencies; organize site visits to homeless programs or housing projects with political leaders and the media to highlight the ways that your community is successfully or inadequately addressing our housing crisis and homelessness disaster. Be creative!

2   Develop a community action plan. The Kitchen Table Discussion Guide which accompanies this booklet will help you to create your own community action plan. Brainstorm ways that you can help support community services including meal programs, and distribution of warm clothes and socks.

3   Build housing. Faith groups, unions, and community groups have contributed to our affordable housing stock. Even a single unit on church property, for example, can help to emphasize the need and show how easily and cheaply it can be done.

AS CITIZENS

1   Endorse the One Percent Solution. Encourage others in your community to endorse the Solution. Visit http://www.tdrc.net/endorse.htm to learn more about how to join this campaign that calls on governments to double their current spending on a housing solution to 2% of their budgets.

2   Contact elected officials at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Invite them to your local events. Organize a group visit. Write letters to them or call. Use opportunities like special holiday meals to organize a letter writing session; provide paper, pens, stamped envelopes, and sample messages at meetings and events. Be sure to keep the government officials informed of the local struggles in your area and ask what they are doing to end homelessness. When they receive more than a few visits or letters about any subject, they sit up and take note.

3   Use the media to help spread the word. Encourage prominent people in your community to write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor. Invite media to your community events. Something as simple as calls to media communicating your concern for homeless people in your area or supporting or opposing a recent story can influence how the issue in covered in the future.

4   Prepare for upcoming elections. Work with others to ensure housing is a key election issue during federal and provincial election campaigns. Be sure to prepare and distribute fact sheets along with suggested questions for the candidates.

[SOURCES: SUGGESTIONS ADAPTED FROM TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE (WWW.TDRC.NET), CITY OF VANCOUVER, AND OTHERS]

6 social inclusion and homelessness

Inclusive cities support participation and involvement by diverse community members, particularly vulnerable populations. Inclusion is about building a new culture that is shared by everyone rather than bringing people into existing structures. The Inclusive Cities Canada initiative outlines five dimensions of inclusion:

Diversity. How well do public institutions provide recognition and respond to diverse groups in the population? When applying this lens to the topic of homelessness we would examine if people who are homeless are being treated with dignity and respect when accessing needed services.

Human Development. Can all community members develop their talents, skills, and capacities to contribute to the community? Does the community support homeless people to develop their individual capacities? For example, are there volunteer opportunities, job training and other supports? What supports are available to business people who want to hire homeless individuals?

Civic Engagement. How is active participation in local government, community organizations, and civic life being promoted? To what extent are people who are homeless consulted on the decisions that impact on their lives? Do advisory committees that include homeless people make recommendations on program decisions? Are service users polled on a regular basis and informed about the decisions that impact on their lives?

Living Conditions. Are there significant differences in levels of income, decent jobs, safe neighbourhoods, and the availability of affordable housing among city residents? Do community services take into account the unique issues associated with people who are homeless (e.g. transportation, sleeplessness, nutrition)? Are programs able to "meet people where they are at" and assist them in moving at their own speed to the next level?

Community Services. How well is your city served by important public services such as health care, crisis, and transportation services? This dimension relates to the degree of cooperation that exists amongst service providers in providing support to people who are homeless. Populations such as Aboriginal people, youth, seniors, immigrants, women, and families may have unique service needs.

homelessness glossary

Absolute Homeless People who live and sleep on streets, in back lanes and in parks are considered to be absolutely homeless. They make up less than 20% of the homeless population.

Affordable Housing Most people define affordable housing as that which is an appropriate size and has adequate facilities where no more than 30% of the individual's or family's household income is required to manage its cost.

At-Risk of Homelessness People living in situations that do not meet health and safety standards, do not provide security of tenure and spend 50% or more of their income on housing are at-risk of homelessness. In 2001, there were 125 000 individuals in 56 000 families living at-risk of homelessness in Greater Vancouver.

Chronic Homelessness Individuals who have been homeless for twelve or more months of the past three years are considered to be chronically homeless. Other definitions of chronic homelessness reference disabling conditions.

Core Housing Need According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Commission, a household is said to be in core housing need if its housing falls below at least one of the adequacy, suitability or affordability standards and it would have to spend 30% or more of its income to pay the average rent of alternative local market housing that meets all three standards.

Couch (or sofa) Surfing This term applies to those who are without conventional housing of their own and who "live" informally with friends or acquaintances but do not typically pay rent and are without security of tenure.

Sheltered Homeless Individuals who are living in emergency shelters, safe houses for youth or transition houses for women and their children fleeing violence are considered to be the sheltered homeless. This population is also sometimes referred to as the relative homeless.

Situational Homeless People who are experiencing drastic change in their lives, such as women leaving abusive relationships, and are temporarily without housing are considered to make up the situational homeless population.

Working Poor Individuals who work full-time and yet live in poverty are the working poor. People working full-time at minimum wage in British Columbia are automatically considered to be part of the working poor because they do not have sufficient incomes to cover the cost of basic necessities.

resources

references

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Aboriginal Homelessness
Steering Committee (Greater Vancouver)
www.inhu.ca/homeless_initiative

Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness Learn about the Regional Homelessness Plan for Greater Vancouver and recent efforts to address homelessness. www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness

Homelessness Virtual Library Comprehensive online library of resources on homelessness.
www.ihpr.ubc.ca/EN/jim_frankish/homelessness_virtual_library/

PovNet – Online resource for advocates, people on welfare, and community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty work. <www.povnet.org>

Raise the Rates: Press the provincial government to reduce poverty by improving the welfare system and raising the minimum wage. <www.raisetherates.org>

The View from the Sidewalk: Towards a New Definition of People who are Homeless. A report prepared by people who have experienced homelessness.
<www.vcn.bc.ca/~vda/The%20View%20From%20The%20Sidewalk.pdf>

CANADA

Closing the Distance: Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative (Kingston, Ont.) Project to close the distance between people who are homeless and landlords. Supported Room of One's Own Self Advocacy group.
<www.closingthedistance.spno.ca>

Housing Again – A site dedicated to putting housing back on the public agenda in Canada. <housingagain.web.ca>

National Homelessness Initiative Canadian government initiative to address homelessness.
<www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp>

Raising the Roof – Canada's only national charity dedicated to long-term solutions to homelessness.
<www.raisingtheroof.org>

Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (The 1% Solution) A comprehensive proposal to end homelessness in Canada. <www.tdrc.net>

OUTSIDE CANADA

National Coalition for the Homeless (USA) A national network of people who are experiencing or who have experienced homelessness. Operates a speaker's bureau, resources and advocacy. <www.nationalhomeless.org>

Canadian Labour Congress. <www.canadianlabour.ca>

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Health Canada. Canada's National Drug Strategy. <www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/activit/strategies/drugs-drogues/index_e.html>

Homelessness Parliamentary Research Bureau. <dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/modules/prb04-1-homelessness/index-e.htm>

Inclusive Cities Canada. <www.inclusivecities.ca>

Klein, Seth & Andrea Long (2003). *A Bad Time to Be Poor: An Analysis of British Columbia's New Welfare Policies.* Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC

National Homelessness Initiative. <www.homelessness.gc.ca/corporate/sec4-0_e.asp>

National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty. <www.nlchp.org/Katrina/index.cfm>

Raising the Roof. <www.raisingtheroof.org>

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Toronto Disaster Relief Committee. Homelessness Teaching Guide for Colleges and Universities. <www.tdrc.net>

Wilkinson, Richard and K.E. Pickett (2006). "Income inequality and population health: A review and explanation of the evidence." *Social Science and Medicine, 62(7):*1768–1784.

kitchen table discussion guide

BACKGROUND

A kitchen table discussion is a small group of people who get together to talk. The setting can be informal—a kitchen, living room, lunch room or coffee shop. You don't need to be an expert. What you do need is compassion and a willingness to share ideas aimed at developing solutions that work for everybody.

Anybody can host a discussion. All you need to do is bring together a group of people who are willing to share and discuss ideas. If you are willing to host a discussion:

1 **Choose a time and location.** Someplace comfortable where there will be a minimum of interruptions is ideal.

2 **Develop an invitation list.** You may want to hold a discussion for a specific group (e.g. community service workers, women, men, business owners, etc.) At the same time, you may look to invite a group that reflects a wide diversity of experience. Keep in mind that you are not attempting to reach consensus, but rather sharing ideas and experiences.

3 **Start with introductions.** Appoint a note taker and also appoint a facilitator if necessary.

4 **When finished with your discussion consider preparing a short summary for circulation** to your local MP, MLA, Municipal Council as well as other decision makers and community organizations.

GUIDELINES

A kitchen table discussion works best when people feel free to respectfully say what's on their minds without being judged. They need to know that there are no right or wrong things to say and that everyone's ideas are valuable. You can remind people that their own experiences are important and that their ideas do count.

As host, ask people to agree to the following:

• **Listen to others**

• **There are no right or wrong ideas**

• **Everyone's contribution is valuable**

• **Don't interrupt**

• **Don't argue.** Instead of arguing, ask questions to clarify ideas and thoughts. Avoid defending your "position," but instead concentrate on clarifying your ideas and on understanding other people's ideas.

• **Be conscious of who is participating.** Use rounds, a speaker's list, or invite those who have not spoken to participate.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1 draw a picture of home

Using materials that are handy, draw a picture of home.

■ Using your picture as a starting point, discuss what home means to you.

■ Group discussion questions:

• Is housing only about having a building or are there other components such as comfort, security and relationships?

• What opportunities do people who live in housing have that others don't?

2 what makes up a home?

Take a blank sheet of paper and rip it into five pieces.
On each piece write a one or two word description of an aspect of home (e.g. food, warmth, relaxation, friends, shower and bath, kitchen etc.)

■ Prioritize your pieces from most important to least important

■ Place your pieces face down on the table. Have another participant take away a piece at random. Discuss what losing this item would mean to you.

■ Take turns removing items at random and discussing how you would feel and what you would do if you lost each.

■ Group discussion questions:

   • How important is social support in our lives? How can building supportive relationships contribute to ending homelessness?

   • What supports and services would be needed to help re-build the items you have lost?

[ADAPTED FROM TORONTO DISASTER RELIEF COMMITTEE]

3 the first hours of the day

One way to illustrate the devastating effects of poverty is to uncover those activities in our own lives that we take for granted:

■ List everything you did for the first two hours of this morning (e.g. took warm shower, made coffee, ate breakfast, read paper, rode bus to work, etc.)

■ Estimate the cost of those activities that involve spending money (e.g. newspaper - 75 cents, bus - $2.25).

■ List the benefits of some of your activities (e.g. shower—*I start the day clean and relaxed;* coffee—*helps me wake up;* paper—*helps me stay informed*).

■ Group discussion questions:

• In a typical day, how long does it take you to spend the $6 that a single employable welfare recipient is expected to live on after shelter expenses?

• How do you think you'd spend your first two hours of the morning if you had no home and no money?

• How long would you be able to hold down a job without a home to support you?

• What is your personal policy on panhandlers? Explain when and why you do or don't give money to people asking for change.

4 personal experiences with homelessness

■ Have you ever lived at financial risk of homelessness?

❑ Lived in a place that needed repair and spent 30% or more of your income on housing.

■ Have you (or people you know) ever experienced the following events that often occur in the lives of people who are homeless:

❑ Lost a job unexpectedly

❑ Ended a relationship unexpectedly

❑ Fallen behind on rent or been evicted

❑ Had your landlord sell the home you're living in

❑ Used or misused substances

❑ Had more debt than you could handle

❑ Been charged with a criminal offence

❑ Been a victim of robbery

❑ Been physically assaulted or beaten

❑ Been hospitalized

❑ Had a gambling problem

❑ Suffered a serious accident

❑ Been hospitalized for a mental health issue

❑ Been sexually assaulted

■ Group discussion questions:

• What are the common elements of each of the above situations (e.g. loss of control, grief, need for support)?

• How could we support people experiencing these situations in a way that would help prevent homelessness?

5 what can one community do? developing an action plan

■ What is the goal or end result that you want to achieve?

■ Brainstorm a list of people, associations, and organizations in the community who can help achieve these goals.

■ What is the best way to communicate with them (e.g. public meeting, email newsletter)

■ Are there unique partnership opportunities that are not being developed?

■ Group discussion questions:

• What are the action steps that are needed?

• Who will make a commitment to undertake the first steps?

6 communicating with the decision makers

■ Based on your discussions and answers to the previous questions what are your recommendations for decision makers at all levels?

■ Who are the decision makers at the local, regional, provincial and federal level?

■ How can you communicate with them (e.g. public meeting, private meeting, letter, policy brief, newspaper article, etc.)?

■ Group discussion questions:

  • Who will take the first steps to communicate with decision makers?

resources

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Aboriginal Homelessness Steering Committee
(Greater Vancouver)
http://www.lnhs.ca/homeless_initiative

Greater Vancouver Regional Steering Committee on
Homelessness Learn about the Regional Homelessness Plan for
Greater Vancouver and recent efforts to address homelessness
www.metrovancouver.org/planning/homelessness
Homelessness Virtual Library Comprehensive online library of
resources on homelessness.
http://www.iphr.ubc.ca/EN/jim_frankish/homelessness_virtual_

library/

PovNet – Online resource for advocates, people on welfare, and
community groups and individuals involved in anti-poverty
work. <www.povnet.org>

Raise the Rates: Press the provincial government to reduce
poverty by improving the welfare system and raising the
minimum wage. <www.raisetherates.org>

The View from the Sidewalk: Towards a New Definition of
People who are Homeless. A report prepared by people who
have experienced homelessness.
<www.vcn.bc.ca/~voice/The%20View%20From%20The%20Sidewalk.pdf>

CANADA

Closing the Distance: Social and Economic Inclusion Initiative
(Kingston, Ont.) Project to close the distance between people
who are homeless and landlords. Supported Room of One's
Own Self Advocacy group.
<www.closingthedistance.spno.ca>

Housing Again – A site dedicated to putting housing back
on the public agenda in Canada. <housingagain.web.ca>

National Homelessness Initiative Canadian government initiative
to address homelessness.
<www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp>

Raising the Roof – Canada's only national charity dedicated
to long-term solutions to homelessness.
<www.raisingtheroof.org>

Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (The 1% Solution)
A comprehensive proposal to end homelessness in Canada.
<www.tdrc.net>

OUTSIDE CANADA

National Coalition for the Homeless (USA) A national network
of people who are experiencing or who have experienced
homelessness. Operates a speaker's bureau, resources and
advocacy. <www.nationalhomeless.org>